

# In need of volunteers

## CASA's 'Speak up' billboards draw attention to need

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**T**he look is haunting. If you've seen a billboard of an expressionless, blue-eyed girl on U.S. 31 near LaVille schools, you've seen the face of a child who could use an adult's help to maneuver through the court system.

The billboard was funded through a grant by the Marshall County Community Foundation to bring CASA to the attention of the public, said Marshall County CASA director Melody Kruger.

Asking adults to speak up for an abused child, billboards throughout the county have been a source for inquiries on becoming a court appointed special advocate (CASA) volunteer.

They need more.

Every day in the United States, some 850 children end up in the foster care system, according to Kruger's report to the Marshall County commissioners.

And for the past three years in Indiana, more than 40 children have died each year at the hands of their parents.

Last year, in Marshall County, there were 112 children identified by the court as a child in need of service after being abused or neglected.

With 23 trained volunteers, 43 children were served at some point by a CASA advocate.

Ten more volunteers have completed the training and will soon



Tribune Photo/VIRGINIA RANSBOTTOM

**A billboard along northbound U.S. 31 near the LaVille schools is a plea to the public to become a court appointed special advocate for an abused or neglected child.**

be assigned to a child. Meanwhile, the number of children needing help has risen to 130.

Fall training is scheduled for Sept. 22 through Oct. 29.

To reach and inform the public about CASA of Marshall County, a Web site is being developed that will also be linked to the National CASA Web site at [www.nationalcasa.org](http://www.nationalcasa.org).

Recently, the Indiana Retired Teachers Association formed a

partnership with CASA.

"The skill set of teachers is really a boon for working with abused and neglected children," Kruger said.

Four Marshall County CASA advocates are retired teachers.

"Our mission is to be a powerful voice for the powerless," Kruger said.

With state and county budget cuts looming, Kruger said the state provides \$19,000 for the program and the county matches the funds

with \$17,000 and office space.

"That covers my salary and training, which is the biggest amount," Kruger said.

Commission president Kevin Overmyer said he would hate to see the program dropped from the budget.

"We know these kids need it," he said.

For information, call CASA of Marshall County at (574) 935-8723.